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Tankefaran

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Brandtal

▶ Välkommen till Tankefaran. I det här numret av Brand samlar vi en rad intervjuer som gjorts de senaste åren i samband med Sverige fått besök av intressanta tänkare med en koppling till autonom teoribildning. Diskussionerna handlar om kapitalismens förändrade former, hur den fragmenterade postfordistiska produktionen förändrar även subjekten, gör våra liv mer osäkra, bryter upp våra gemenskaper och fragmenterar även våra sinnen. Vi behöver inte bara samla oss som subjekt igen – i de nya fabrikerna, på torgen och i kvarteren – utan även samla våra tankar, tänka gemensamt bortom fragmenteringen. En röd tråd i texterna är de uppdelningar som löper rakt igenom dagens arbetarklass; mellan de fast anställda och de i osäkra anställningar eller arbetslöshet, mellan de skuldsatta och de som fortfarande kan backas upp av allmännyttan, mellan de avlönade och de oavlönade. Denna uppdelning följer ofta könade och rasifierade skiljelinjer. Kamper för en garanterad inkomst, sociala skyddsnät och allmänningar utvecklar former för ett gemensamt sammansättande av denna uppdelade och splittrade sammansättning.

Tack till Prekariatet och Psychic Warfare, Yusuf, Elena, Rasmus Redemo och Tankekraft förlag, Michele Masucci och Iaspis som bjudit över dessa föredragshållare och gjort dessa intervjuer möjliga.

▶ Welcome to Tankefaran – a special issue of the magazine Brand. In this issue of Brand, we collect a series of interviews conducted in recent years when interesting thinkers from an autonomist theoretical current visited Sweden. The interviews deal with the changing forms of Capitalism, how the fragmented post-fordist production also changes the subjects, making our lives more precarious, breaks up our communities and fragments even our minds. We do not only need to constitute us as subjects again - in the new factories, in the squares and in the neighborhood - but also to constitute our thoughts, to think beyond the shared fragmentation. A common thread in the texts are the divisions that run right through today's working class; between staff and those in precarious employment or unemployment, between the indebted and those who still benefit from welfare systems, between the paid and the unpaid labour. These divisions often follows gendered and racialized lines. Struggles for a guaranteed income, social safety nets and commons develops a common process of recomposition of this divided and fragmented composition.

Many thanks to Prekariatet and Psychic Warfare, Yusuf, Elena, Rasmus Redemo and Tankekraft förlag, Michele Masucci and Iaspis that invited these speakers and made these interviews possible.

Franco Bifo Berardi

A NEW SUBJECT EMERGED IN THE INSURGENCIES AGAINST THE AUSTERITY MEASURES IN 2011. IN THE SQUARE, IN THE CITY AND ON THE NET THE INDEBTED AND THE PRECARIOUS STARTED TO FORM A COMMON SOCIAL BODY.



Brand: You talk about somewhat new political prospects after the crisis of 2008. Do these political events and formations that have formed after this year reflect a different psychopathology, a recomposition in the making?

Franco: In 2010 you asked me we possibly can have a process of conscious autonomous recomposition of subjectivation within the conditions of precarious work? And my answer was plainly no. Pessimistic, dramatic, but, no. I've been obliged to change my mind since, because the process of recombination in a sense has begun in London, in Athens, in New York, in Tunis, in Cairo, in Madrid. In this sense I would claim that, well, something has happened. And this something has to be properly understood. And furthermore, I must say that 2012 tells another story. The process of recomposition is under way. Precarious and cognitive work successfully identify the square, the city, the net and so on, as locations for possible recomposition. The problem is that we are unable to find the proper way to attack financial Capitalism. The process of recomposition has been unable to act effectively at the level of virtualization; financial dematerialization of power. So, if we shall compare the context at hand 4 years ago, the problem has, in a sense, shifted. At that point, we needed to call upon, to mobilize a movement - the movement wasn't there. And then suddenly, there it was, from December 14, 2010, to Acampada, to Tahrir Square in Cairo and so on. The problem is that what happens next, is that the movement spreads everywhere and is unable to find the real, to adapt; to designate the good level of action.

A new subject, that is to say, a conflictual, active, position to organize around, has been created in the mode of production. In Lazzarato and Negri's books, it's a subjectivation of the indebted. But can the indebted be a productive subjectivity to work with?

Debt is a form of submissiveness. True, in a Foucauldian way, the subject is always submissive. And etymologically there is also connectivity, the subjectum; submitted. Actually, debt is not a process of conscious autonomous subjectivation, it is a form of slavery. Look at Occupy Wall Street now, what they have been trying to do is to create a movement against the student debt, making the debt a central question of the movement now. I mean, the indebtment, (the creation of the condition of debt) is the new condition of submission. The political problem is that we are unable to defeat it, because it's not something that you can aggress as if it was the Winter Palace. I mean, it's not a physical enemy that you can destroy. You can destroy the bank, but the bank is nothing, in the bank there is nothing. The real power is not in the bank but in cyberspace, it's in the abstract sphere of financial connection. The only way to fight the power effectively is the algorithmic sabotage. So the movement that has occupied the city, the squares, the streets, the schools, the factory and so on; is it useless? No, of course not! But is it effective? No.

You say that the general intellect has lost its body. Today, we have some movements that combine their activism on the net and the streets, but still without a changed sociality, still with somewhat liberal ideas of freedom. How important is the reappropriation of bodies?

Take for example New York and Occupy Sandy. They said that okey, the catastrophe is here; we have to deal with the effects of the environmental catastrophe. In Athens it was about the social, if you go to Beirut it's the military catastrophe. They try to imagine the possibilities of a reactivation of the movement, not by avoiding, or impeaching, blocking, but by reconstituting the conditions of survival, and possibly of life inside the storm. The bodily dimension, our needs and wants in meetings with others, isn't enough, but it's crucial. In the year of 2011 we saw the bodily, erotic, reactivation of the social body. For example la acampada, 6 million people meeting on the streets during spring time. It's about a reactivation of a human dimension of physical meeting. It's a necessity, but it's not the tool with which to fight financial Capitalism. So we have to think at two levels at the same time; we have to accumulate and redirect the bodily effect. What is it? It is the reactivation of social solidarity. We find something there that will be used in the new financial fight.

In the operaismo tradition there's always been an analysis of capitalist decomposition and recomposition from below, but there's never any analysis of the reaction coming from below. A reaction to 2008 or 2011, with everything from the Muslim brotherhood, balcanization tendensies in Europe to openly fascist parties like the Golden Dawn and Jobbik. How do you see that process?

This is exactly my critique of the Negrian vision, that has always been blind on this point, seeing the reactive side of the multitude. When I was teaching in Beirut in the beginning of 2012, I got the impression of a cultural uprising which was essentially based not only on the revolutionary insurrection, but on the emergence of a new kind of people, the cognitive, precarious people, who exist. They are a minority but an important minority in the arab world. This is the dynamics that is starting everywhere in Europe, everywhere you have processes of civil conflict.

How to counter that?

I think it's too late to counter, the process is already here. Now, for us, is the moment to create spaces that allow separation from this process. Now the relationship between the campada, the physical meeting, and the creation of the European virtual net becomes very important. Because we have to be able to connect the islands in the net and come out of the process. In Italy for example, it is impossible, it is very tragic. So we have to declare a process of internationalization, Europe is us, reclaim Europe as an internationalist process, as a democratic process, as socialist in many senses. They are destroying everything in Europe that was good.

I see that the neoliberal and technocrat are two different currents doing the same job. Berlusconi and Monti have the same problem, Berlusconi was too interested in the mafia, and Monti more in the balcanization of society. So the real dynamics, the polarity I see, is between this neoliberal, technocratic destruction of society, and the fascist reaction that comes out next, that is already evident in some situations. Greece is totally clear and is going to emerge into war.

How can we breed continuity in an age of fragmented time, this unilateral perception of repeated nows, and intolerance for long term effects - as can be seen not only in general but also in our own movement?

The continuity of the social effect that the movement can produce is at the level of insolvency. First of all, this means the ability to not pay, the creation of communites that are able to annull the debt. In Greece, Spain and also some parts of Italy, there is the creation of community currencies, and then we have the phenomenon of Bitcoin. This is a very ambiguous process, because in a sense it's a form of reconstitution of the monetary relations in the movement. But it's also a possibility to escape for some social communities. Really we're entering a period of total experimentation. The theoretical definition of money is one thing; the reality of a community that becomes unable to survive is something that you have to face for what it is. I think that the creation, also in Argentina in 2001, when the banks closed and the majority of the population was -, at that point a new process started which was the creation of popular restaurants in the streets, of alternative commons in some parts of Buenos Aires. In a way, I call it insolvency. This is an interesting concept, since it's not only the refusal to pay a debt, but something more subtle. It means that I refuse the translation of my language into the language of the market. It's the symbolic debt which is at stake, Lazzarato and others are speaking of the symbolic debt as a sort of moral chain. The debt as sin. A perception which is very strong in European reality, it's the reality of the Protestants and Catholics. And the Orthodox too, those horrible Orthodox, the terrible and lazy Catholics and the good Protestants. This, which constitute the deep beck ground of 500 years of European history, are coming back in ways that cannot be said. It's not part of the public discourse, the different conceptions of work that has stratified European history. That should be interesting, to go back to the origins of the Protestant view of work, and the persistence of the catholic idea of work. Weber was right when he said that the modern bourgouisie is based on the Protestant idea of an ethical relation to work and so on. But Catholicism hasn't been outside the story of modern Capitalism, it's another story of modern Capitalism. I mean the northern America and southern America have been in the same world with two different temporalities in terms of relation to work. I wonder, in our age of immaterial production, Semio-capitalism and so on, if not the barrock, catholic idea, of a lazy, alliatorial, random relation to work, is rather than being unproductive, just another form of productivity. It's the hidden story of modern Europe that is coming out but in an aggressive way. The good Germans don't want to pay for the lazy Greeks.

The other interesting point is, what is



work, why is work a moral value? Probably the real problem is that we're so obsessed by the idea that humans have to work all day, all life, 8 hours a day, or nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Probably the contrary is true, that you should be able to come out of the obligation of working all life long.

Is there any danger in creating our own social securities?

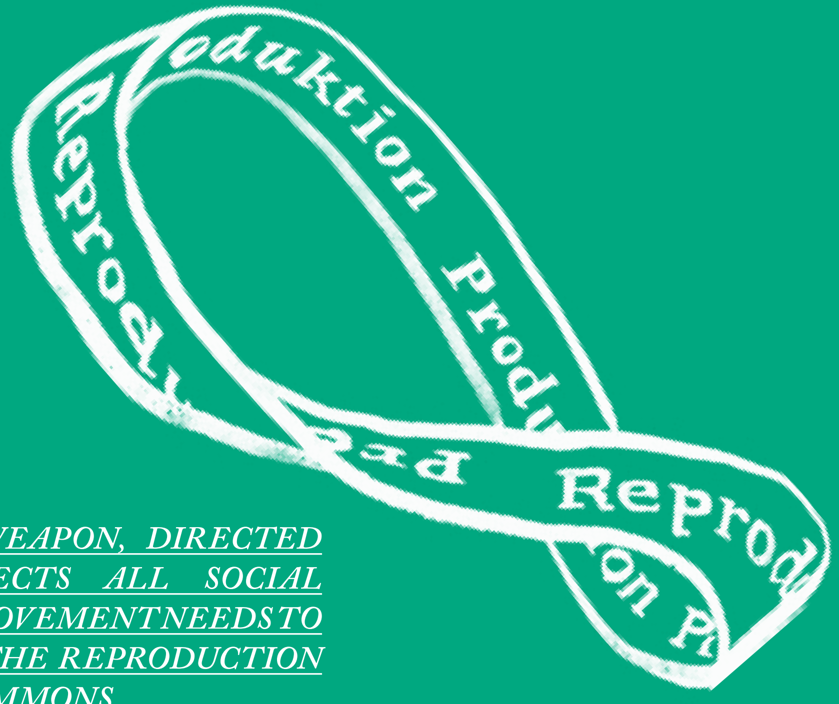
Of course basic income is better, it could be a very clever way to come out of this mess. But I see basic income as part of a project of insolvency. We are talking of a leading class, of a financial class, that is absolutely not going in the direction of basic income. This is totally at odds with the politics of the southern European governments, of the European Central Bank and so on. So what are we talking about? We are talking about something that we have to be able conquer on our own. They will not pass a law saying that every European citizen will have the rights to 1000 euros per month. I mean, this is a utopia, a totally rational utopia: if you think in purely Keynesian terms, the way out is simple, 1000 euros every month. It's going to relaunch the economy and create a sense of solidarity in Europe, but they are clearly saying forget about it.

We must understand what's happening in the capitalist brain. In the past 40 years, Marxists were accustomed to think that capital is as a brain, as a strategic brain. In Italy we call it il plano de capitale, the plan, the program of capitalism. And in a sense it was true; since Keynes, Capitalism has been based on rationality. But now, the contrary is true. At the environmental, social and economic level… Paul Krugman is repeating every day the same rational banality - that is obvious, but nobody listens to him. What has happened to the enlightened bourgoisie? The Bourgoisie no longer exists, the time of this territorialized class that plans the future of the community, the territory, of the physical property is over. Because the financial class is acting in a totally different way, in a totally random way, entirely detached from the temporality of the future. In this cycle, you don't have a counterpart. You cannot draft a negotiation and fight the conflict, for the revolution – after which we persuade the enemy to come to terms. No, no way. Because of this, the only thing we can aspire to is insolvency; to create the conditions for basic income. But you know what this means in the context of massive unemployment? It means going to the supermarket and taking things, to organize forms of violent appropriation of goods. This is an unavoidable step in the future.

Franco Bifo Berardi was interviewed in december 2012 at Södra Teatern by Samira Ariadad and Mathias Wåg from Brand and Cesar Tafoya from Prek(a)riatet.

Illustration: Jim Thorell

Silvia Federici



DEBT HAS A GENDER. IT'S A WEAPON, DIRECTED AGAINST WOMEN. DEBT EFFECTS ALL SOCIAL REPRODUCTION. THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT NEEDS TO RE-OPEN THE STRUGGLE OVER THE REPRODUCTION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE COMMONS.

From 2007 onwards, living around, in and through financial/economic crisis is what has coloured the qualities and characteristics of our lives. Austerity, competition, stagnant and falling wages and debt has become a regime of truth and a generalized form of disciplined-living for the many plugged into the circuits of local/national/global production. The neoliberal turn in the 70's has brought one capitalist-crisis after another, restructuring commodity production, consumption, and the enclosure of commons along the way. It would appear that for the capitalist class, crisis seems to be a 'productive' structural part of its system, leaving the rest of us on our knees.

When speaking about crisis we tend to refer to the crisis of production: that which pertains to factories, new forms of industry, sweatshops, mines, and agriculture: the realm of commerce, technology, and commodities. While many new movements and projects of resistance have come into being as a result of understanding this crisis of production in it's relative form, it's high time we go further in our analysis and practices and begin to speak about the crisis of reproduction in it's absolute form.

In relation to the political economy reproduction pertains not only to human biological realities but includes the realms of society; the home, what is defined as family, schools, neighborhoods, social-services and the output of a very special "commodity"- which is no commodity at all: human beings and forms of life.

Crisis as Class war The explosion of youth unemployment, the stagnation of wages for those who get to earn them, the slashing of the minimum wage (The technocrats of Greece can currently boast as they've slashed minimum wage by 25%, making it the lowest in Europe) are by now familiar traits of the so called advanced countries. Allowances, benefits, pensions - entitlements which we are told are no longer affordable and therefore belong to a social vision of the past - have now become the entitlements that are violently guaranteed to the 1%! What was once the Welfare State has become a penal state that outsources the incarceration of immigrants without papers to profit- driven firms while finding new ways of criminalizing the congregation of descent in the public space. Need we mention how the forms of personal, sovereign, and social debt is becoming the collective condition of discipline of our day?

Thus, the crisis of production becomes the crisis of (re)production. It is becoming increasingly expensive and precarious to live. We are all faced with the attacks to health care services, the rising costs of housing, food, dwindling benefits for unemployment, access to care for the disabled, cuts to pensions, reduction in availability of care, all impeding on our capacity to reproduce ourselves - and it is women and minorities who are the first to feel it. Therefore our movements can no longer make a distinction between production and reproduction. Indeed, for the next emerging feminist-anti-capitalist movement, production and reproduction are understood as both one and the same, entwined like a Mobius strip.

Bringing the margins to the center

Let us jump back to 1972: The International Feminist Collective launched the

Wages for Housework campaign in an attempt to highlight the fact that the basis of oppression, in patriarchal Capitalism, was women's exclusion from the wage, and the social contract the wage entails. Making the invisible become visible in this way was in a sense a Copernican turn for feminism, thanks to its newfound post-work agenda. It renounces both socialist feminism, which took its queue from Engels (claiming that women are not productive in Capitalism and thus subordinated and excluded from the revolutionary subject - the proletarian - because of the lack of capitalist relations in their lives (!)) and radical feminism, claiming that Capitalism successes patriarchy and is therefore something secondary. From a contemporary viewpoint the synthesis of these two strands contains a ghastly echo of liberal feminism…

In turn, feminists involved in the Wages for Housework campaign began their struggle on the premises that unpaid domestic work is probably the most productive in a capitalist sense since it (re) produces the worker for the next day of wage labour. It is a form of work that produces daily and reproduces generationally. According to the campaign's proponents, Capitalism takes advantage of how patriarchal society naturalizes domestic work as essentially female, bringing into light that which for so long went unnoticed in the male-dominated labour movements.

WFH aimed to wake up the movement and subvert the capitalist state through a critique of the patriarchal division of domestic work. By de-naturalizing and recognizing this domestic work as added value for capital it demands a wage, which would in turn give women in general, and housewives in particular, more leverage in their lives as they become less reliant on the income generated by waged-men. Although domestic work might be the anti-chamber to wage-work it is at the same time part of the assembly line. Remember, the family is also a place of and in crisis!

The demand for an income, understood as an instrument to organize social relations differently and to mobilize the unpaid workers against these obscured forms of exploitation, is a struggle over the means of our (re)production and the common/s.

An important figure for this struggle was, and is, Silvia Federici.

On Saturday the 26th of January 2013, autonomous feminist writer and activist, Silvia Federici gave a lecture, along with George Caffentzis, at Folkets hus in Copenhagen, Denmark: "Current Struggles and the Commons- Seminar on Zero-work, debt-strikes, (re)production and the commons". Prekari(a)tet was there and, interested in how the commons can be the site for a post-work politics, took the opportunity to give a little feminist spark to this room full of (m)anarchists…

Brand: If I were to label myself anything it would be "feminist"; because what you're speaking about now is really what I think is at the core of feminism, which is: Publicizing, Politicizing, and Radically transforming social relations and forms of reproduction. So I suppose this is a request to you, perhaps, especially you Silvia: To elaborate a little bit more on what you can bring now from your engagement in Wages for Housework into a contemporary context; a contemporary struggle.

Silvia: Basically, first of all, again; the importance of not looking at social realities and this is not only inside Wages for Housework but the feminist movement as a whole; not looking at social realities with the assumption that there is some sort of abstract, universal viewpoint. Then you realize that in fact when you speak of debt, there are different ways in which indebtment effects people. For example, in the case of the housing-crisis in the United States; which was originated by all these fraudulent activities of the banks. They gave these kind of sub-prime loans that had variable interest rates etc., etc.…

The main targets and victims were women, black women in particular and minority people in general. So there is a racial and gender perspective also on this issue. So debt affects people. So this in fact, in relation to the debt-struggle in general, is beginning to look at the different ways debt is effecting students, people who've taken mortgages and credit cards, and so on. There is not only one way. There are some people in fact, who are particularly targeted. Also what the commercialization of education has done: the whole restructuring of education that has now become an enterprise. That education now becomes a commodity: what are the impacts on women for instance? The whole relation to reproduction; we call it the new contraceptive, because you can't even afford to even think of having a child.

Debt and tuitions are becoming new forms of contraception! Because whether you want to have a child or not you can't even put going to school on your agenda (because the cost of acquiring a degree). In terms of the issue of Wages for Housework: I don't know how many people here are familiar with that demand. There was a time in the 70's when one part of the women's movement I was part of, had a campaign to demand 'wages for housework' on the argument that the discrimination against women means the less power women have. The fact that we have been discriminated again has to do with the fact that the work ((re)productive labour) has never been seen as "work"; it's always been devalued and women have been economically dependent, dependent on men, etc., etc., etc.

Basically, Capitalism has divided up two spheres of social life: the wage/the unwaged. This division has been a source of tremendous amount of exploitation and the division of the proletariat. So 'Wages for Housework' for us was a kind of lever not only to undo our dependence but also to change this architecture of inequality, the architecture of exploitation… Now at that time we were attacked from so many corners not only from the male-dominated left but we were also attacked from socialist-feminists, liberal-feminists, radical-feminists… and the argument being that this kind of demand is going to institutionalize women in the home and it's going to confirm that the women are housewives etc. I think looking backward; now we've had forty years and 'Wages For Housework' never won. In fact, the other great strategy of the women's movement was the one, if you want, that prevailed: the idea that women entering en masse into the waged-workforce or having access to the wage, having access to labour in a social way would become more emancipated. Well, after three or four decades of that history now we see the limits of that strategy. In fact, I have to say that I see many of the criticism that we made to the strategy of 'liberation through wage-work'… We said liberation through acquiring and asking the State to give us money for what we were already doing, rather than liberation through another type of work. I believe that their strategy proved that we were actually correct, because now we see that the women not only did not emancipated themselves through the wage: interestingly enough women have entered the waged-work place at a time when the waged-work place was under the most severe attack! Women have become waged-workers at a time when waged-work was meant to lose; it meant to become precarious, it meant to lose all the entitlements that people have fought for. So they [women] enter into the workplace at a time when the workplace was bombarded.

Second of all, they never stopped doing housework! So now you have a situation of a woman doing two jobs, having no money, and living in a state of permanent crisis. There is a lot of evidence across the world that women are still doing most of the unpaid work. Women (and also children!) are the unpaid workers of the world! A lot of housework has gone back to the home in the 90's. We see the cafeterias but we don't see the housework that goes into the home. Even with the restructuring of, not only social benefits in general, but cuts in services, for example the services to the elderly; so that now you have to take care more and more of your parents or your relatives because the services to the elderly has been cut. For the "non-sufficient" elderly. Also, the reform of healthcare in the United States: If you were being operated, went in for some disease or perhaps a bypass, you could lay there peacefully in the hospital, now they send you back home practically bleeding!

So now you have to learn so many things as a family member (which means usually women). You have to learn how to put catheters on because they don't send you a nurse, which means you have to learn to do a whole lot of medical things that in the past the doctor was doing in a hospital.

Pharmaceutical and medical companies are now creating new assembly lines that are creating medical products just for the home, so that you can do dialysis in your kitchen! I'm not joking. All kinds of instruments are being made for the housewife so she can actually provide those services that used to be done by experts.

So we are facing a crisis, and this is why we need and there is a struggle for the commons because every woman I know is at a breaking point because the amount of work she must do. All my life I've tried to skip housework in the sense of… when I was younger, (I've done a lot of housework, first of all) I made a struggle in my life as a young woman not to center my life around doing housework, reproductive work, I tried not to have children because I wanted to have another type of life… Before or later, the housework waits around the corner for you. The idea that struggling for the waged-labour helps you avoid the unpaid labour of reproduction is an illusion.

I see the need for a new type of women's movement that re-opens the struggle of reproduction. Of course this is part of the women's movement but it is also the men's movement. Men are also involved in this issue. They begin to not only look at the changes in the work place but also the question of social reproduction, and that to me is also part of the discussion of the commons. As well as the discussion or re-appropriating the wealth of the State, so instead of using it to kill people which is what it's being used for now, we can use it to reproduce ourselves! This is really the struggle today!

Interview by Karin Bähler Lavér, Maral Shafeie and Cesar Tafoya for Prekari(a)tet

Illustration: Prekari(a)tet

Mark Fisher

THE CAPITALIST REALITY IS DEPRESSING. WE ARE CONSTANTLY DREAMING OF SOMETHING ELSE. BUT YET WE HAVE DIFFICULTIES IN IMAGINING AN ALTERNATIVE. IT IS TIME TO ASK OURSELVES WHAT WE WANT. AND START ACHIEVING THINGS.



Brand: Can you describe the affective consequences of what you are calling "Capitalist Realism", which also is the name of your book?
Mark: In the UK and many other countries where there have been very extreme forms of neoliberal governance, we've seen a rise of affective disorders and depression, particularly amongst the young. I think many of the people suffering from those conditions, the last thing they will connect them to is anything political. But of course, that is in itself political. The fact that they don't make the connections between their own kind of discontent - unhappiness, disaffection - and the social and political conditions in which they live is partly why the suffer from those things in the first place.

Do you think that affect is commonly known as something inside individuals and not between them?
Absolutely. We live in a culture of a very narrow emotional bandwidth. A culture that is obsessively emotional, I think. And based on a way we might call consensual sentimentality. Behind the privatisation of stress lie two things I'd like to focus on. One is the emergency of a kind of therapeutic culture which insists on emotions at all times, that the core of us is our emotional response to things. That kind of therapeutic culture is assumptions of widely distribute, far-beyond psychotherapy itself. One can see it in things like reality TV, for example X-factor, which has a therapeutic emotionalism behind it. I think the underlining assumptions of therapeutic culture are individualistic. The dominant forms of psychotherapy are those that will focus on the individual's private life. In other words, the expense of the social conditions. It is slightly absurd when you take a step back. If your work conditions are deteriorated, if you have no plausible vision of security, if you are employed on short-term contract, if you're working longer hours for less money, then it's not a surprise that your level of stress has increased. You shouldn't be talking of people's childhood in these conditions. What you need to talk about is the fact that these levels of stress are unmanageable. But the whole therapeutic emphasis is to make the workers take responsibility for their own stress, rather than looking at the actual causes of that stress. Which isn't saying that therapy is no use at all. Well, it's a bit like what Marx said about religion, that it could really comfort people. Therapy can also make people's lives less miserable. But in the same way religion didn't affect the causes of the actual misery, I don't think therapy can deal with the causes, only the symptons.

This leads us to a second thing, which is drugs. On the one hand we have therapy and on the other we have drugs, and a massive rise of antidepressants. I think Franco Berardi "Bifo" is right when he says that we couldn't really have had an extreme capitalist culture without antidepressants in order to allow people to cope with the new levels of stress. Drugs are used as if the stress had been caused by one's brain substance, rather than by living in objectively stressful conditions, which most of us now do live in.

In your book you describe late Capitalism and our difficulties in imagining an alternative. Why do you think that is?
Consumer Capitalism has been very successful. Why is that? Because it has managed to colonize and divert a sense of looking for a lost object that would complete us. What is consumerism but that, consumerism is the persuasive object which inevitably and immediately disappoint us and which leads us on to search for something else. The object turns to dust as soon as we have it.

From another angle, I think the crucial thing is not to be saying "oh, Capitalism is all about a drive and what we really ought to be doing is going back to a organic relation to the world" or something like that. None of us want that. The problem for the left is how do we have a version of left politics that can fit with what Freud called the "death drive". Some forms of the left, particularly anarchist variants I think, are all about going back to some steady state. But we'll be bored as soon as we think about it! All of our technologies taken from us, we are back on some sort of organic farm, smoking dope and sitting around. Obviously this does not include all anarchists, but certain tendencies in anarchism. You know what I mean.

We want to be saying that we can deliver you a superior form of modernity. You like going to supermarkets? We'll give you something better than supermarkets!

The question about desire is very crucial and serious. We can't only be on the side of repressive authoritarianism, dreariness, stopping, resistance, blocking and obstruction. We have to take this thing about desire and say that we can deliver what people want, better than Capitalism can.

For example, why does people want to go to Starbucks? It's clearly one of the most successful capitalist enterprises there is. Or in the UK we have Tesco, the biggest supermarket, which everyone claims to hate because it ruins all the little shops. But of course, who are the people going to Tesco then, given it is one of the most successful retail giants of the world. We could say "support little shops, don't go to Tesco", but why should we support little shopkeepers? Why should we try to save a condition of petit bourgeoisie from a few years ago? What we need is to go beyond Tesco. Tesco is a pretty rubbish form of something that could be better, and what people want are generic, homogeneous, impersonal spaces. You don't want local shops for local people. Impersonality is an achievement of modernity. Of course, we don't want all culture to be like that. But still, isn't very ironic that these very things are exactly the kind of things that communism was accused of? But this is what Capitalism produces.

But instead of only saying it's terrible, we have to admit that there is a desire for the impersonal and that we can do a better one.

What I want to say is that the desire for Starbucks and Tesco, is the desire for communism. No one likes these things, they go to them, there's obviously a certain appeal to them, but of course this could be done better. I think the problem with something like Tesco or Starbucks is not that they're gigantic and impersonal, but that the critique of them often gets mixed up in a dream back to local organism, which is petit bourgeoisie nostalgia.

In the current situation, which you are describing, do we have a possibility to demand something concrete?

It's very important to ask what we would want. Well, I don't want to be in a condition where I am working 50-60 hours a week for a low wage, on short term contracts without any stability, always looking for the next chance. It is like "Bifo" says, in the old days you got rewarded for being an entrepreneur. Today everyone is required to think and act like an entrepreneur. But I don't want to be a fucking entrepreneur!

But do I want to go back to old-style fordism, working from 9 to 5 in a factory? No, I don't want that. It comes back to the question of desire. Fordism didn't only collapse because Capitalism restructured, also because the workers didn't want to be in boring jobs for 40 years of their lives. But did they want to be in this world of precarity? No, they didn't either. The question is what was wanted. And what we would want today. I think we seriously need to discuss different forms of basic income. But it's not easy. Things are currently so bad, it's almost like we need a revolution just in order to get the basic reforms in place. The opposition doesn't work anymore. Our basic demands are not crazy utopianism, but we still have problem with imagining it happening, that is what's difficult about it. One of our weaknesses is the fact that our opponents are able to say "your ideas all sound very well, but it's just wouldn't work". We need concrete demands, so people have to explain to us why it wouldn't work. Because let's face it, we're in the middle of these crisis, what doesn't work is the system we're under now. Nothing could be clearer than that.

How do we organize when people are self-employed, not working in the same spaces, being depressed in their own homes and acting individually?

Well, how does capital organize? Capital manages to produce homogenous ideology in those conditions. So if it can do it, then we can. The question is what we need to do. Capital still operates on media and has advertising. So we need counter-advertising and counter-media.

One of the things capital has over us is the control of the mainstream media. Almost because of the rise of new media, mainstream media has more power than before. A lot of the energy that previously were going to contesting the mainstream media are now hived off in to some kind of alternative-autonomous circuits. In this case I mean autonomous in a bad way, meaning that they only reflect on themselves. This is one thing that is crucial to us. We have to contest that terrain and get the message out there. That's one side of it. Another one is how do we coordinate people? I think it's important to ask what people are looking for when they are on social media. Not what they are getting, but what they are looking for is a sense of belonging, a sense of collectively. And if we put this into a project, there is a difference between a political project of "we the precarious", and of "me, my narcissistic self". Because, let's admit it, it's miserable to be a human individual. It's horrible. Any form of enjoyment in life is to do with escaping of being that really.

The question is how do we discipline capital. In the old days you could discipline capital by admitting that we are all in this together, if the bosses are trying to do something we'll walk out of the factory. Today that isn't possible. I think we have to understand that you don't have to bring all your forces to bare on the whole of Capitalism at once. That's just not going to work. But how does discipline work on us? It's not by the fact that you're going get caught for every infraction. It is more about someone near to you might have been caught for it and therefore you are frightened to do it. It's the same way with capital. If we target particularly "exploits" of the precarious and really come down hard on them, put all of our resources on them for a while, than the others will be frightened that they will face this. I think we need to think in these crude behavioural terms. What motivates us is the same thing that motivates them. We have to introduce fear here. Bosses must fear us. They feared unions, and they must fear us now.

I think the problem is that there's far too much tolerance of failure on the left. Like it is fine to fail. I really hate this slogan "fail again and fail better". But why? Fuck that. Fail if you fail, learn from failings so you succeed next time. Why are we in this failing model? It comes from the fact that we don't think we can win and that is a comfortable position. Instead we have to think of achieving things. It doesn't mean we'll always achieve them, but don't achieving them is a problem. Then we have to change what we do so we can achieve them.

The interview was made by Samira Ariadad from Brand in September 2010.

Illustration: Oskar Hult

Judith Revel



MINA KÄRA HERRAR KAPITALISTER, PARASITER. DET ÄR DAGS ATT NI BÖRJAR BETALA. FÖR HELA MITT LIV. ERT HERRAVÄLDE MÅ HA VÄXT TILL OCH TÄCKER NU HELA DYGNET. MEN DET GÖR ÄVEN MITT MOTSTÅND. SÅ HOSTA UPP STÅLARNA NU.

Det är intressant att koppla ihop prekaritet med styrningskonst (governmentality). Hos den författare som jag helst använder mig av i mitt politiskt tänkande, nämligen Foucault, betyder styrningskonst – utan att bli för teknisk – två motsatta men oskiljaktiga saker. Det ena är styrandet över de som lever, det vill säga du, jag och alla andra. Här betyder styre rent konkret förvaltningen, ledningen, utsugningen, värdeförmeringen, kort sagt infångandet, förvaltningen och utplundringen. Men det betyder även något annat, som är svårt att föreställa sig på samma gång: Människors förmåga att trots den ständiga blykappan [järnburen] av utplundring lyckas kränga av sig tvångströjan, flytta fram sina positioner, streta, bända, kämpa, slå tillbaka och kort sagt bejaka motsättningarna som alltid uppkommer inom styrningskonsten. Det består av båda sakerna, både makt och subjektivering.

Vad är då prekaritet? Det är det mest slående exemplet på den tvetydighet som kännetecknar det sätt där vi numera blir omdefinierade av ett tillstånd som på samma gång rör arbetet, existensen, det affektiva och språket. Jag använder inte ordet postmodernt – det är föråldrat – utan hellre ord som exempelvis postfordistisk, kognitiv och imperiell. Prekaritet är inte ett ord taget ur tomma luften, utan ett nyckelbegrepp sedan 20 år tillbaka som till att börja med användes för att beskriva resultatet av en rad olika strider. Striderna gick ut på att befria sig från en modell för arbete byggd på tvång och skyldigheter, det vill säga arbetet underställt en arbetsgivare – lönearbetet. Prekaritet betydde, och betyder fortfarande, att ta sig ur inskränkningen som utgörs av kroppars värdeförmering som uppstod i och med industrialiseringen då arbetskraften skapades. Prekaritet betydde att ta sig ur blykappan av underkastelse och avsubjektivering eftersom man var berövad sin egen subjektivitet. Man var efterfrågad som kroppsarbetare, som fysisk arbetskraft, men fördrevs från sitt eget liv, blev förnekad att njuta frukterna av ens arbete.

Att vara prekär innebar att vara utan arbetsgivare. Både i ett land som Italien och i världen i stort, ledde striderna från 1968 och under hela 70-talet till det man i Italien kallar "F-skattefolket", de som startar eget. Att kunna säga "jag är min egen chef" har varit en stor befrielse. Problemet med egenföretagarna är inte att de i slutändan röstar på Berlusconi, på Sarkozy i Frankrike eller Blair i Storbritannien. Problemet finns i den självvalda prekariteten – "jag bestämmer över min egen tid, jag skiljer inte på arbetet som tar knäcken på mig och fritid där jag inte längre har tid varken för att älska, äta, läsa, gå ut eller ta hand om barnen och så vidare". När man tagit sig ur den buren, ur uppdelningen i tredjedelar av ens levda tid – åtta timmars arbete, åtta timmars sömn, åtta timmars liv – har det inte lett till någon ökning av fritid i betydelsen tid när jag gör vad jag själv vill. I stället har det lett till en ökning av utsugningen av ens arbete. Detta innebär paradoxalt nog att fritid och arbetstid flyter ihop. När jag hör någon säga "jag vill ha mer fritid, eftersom tiden tillhör mig", så håller jag å ena sidan med, men å andra sidan, vem är det som har mest fritid? De arbetslösa. En arbetslös är en person som har 24 timmar att helt själv förfoga över. Det är inte heller modellen.



För några år sedan gick snabbköpskassörskorna i Frankrike i strejk och det har de gjort regelbundet sedan dess. Snabbköpskassörskor finns överallt, praktiskt taget i hela världen. I Frankrike jobbar de oftast deltid, inte den lagstadgade heltiden som är 35 timmar, utan mellan 20 och 25 timmar utspridda över veckan. Men inte nog med det, timmarna är dessutom utspridda över dygnet, så att de jobbar två timmar på morgonen. Sedan gör de ingenting i tre timmar. Därefter jobbar de en halvtimma vid lunchrusningen, för då behövs det fler kassörskor, sedan en och en halv timma ingenting. Runt fem jobbar de två timmar för då är det rusning igen då alla ska handla middagsmat. Sedan börjar kvällskiftet. De har inte tid att åka hem mellan arbetspassen, så trots att de bara får betalt fyra-fem timmar per dag innebär jobbet i praktiken 14 timmars arbetsdag. Detta är ett exempel på hur arbetstiden och den fritt levda tiden flyter ihop, utan att man själv kan påverka det.

En annan fråga som jag själv känner väl till gäller produktiv tid. Eftersom det inte finns någon fastlagd arbetstid i mitt yrke, förutom undervisningstimmarna som också kräver förberedelse; skrivningar ska rättas, jag måste fundera och så vidare. Det här gäller varje syssla där tänkandet eller förberedelserna sker hemma eller i social samverkan tillsammans med andra. Vad räknas till mitt arbete? Vilken är min produktiva tid? Produktion är när jag stämplar in eller ut, men produktion är också hela den tid som går åt till att utarbeta det som omvandlas till värde under det som betraktas som arbetstid och som jag får lön för.

I slutet av 1990-talet och början av 2000-talet började en ny kamp i Frankrike bland de som utsattes för de här villkoren, när arbetstid och fritid går i varandra. Les Intermittents du spectacle organiserade timanställda inom underhållningsindustrin och teatervärlden. Inte för att de skulle vara finare än andra, utan för att de utgjorde det främsta exemplet på detta nya paradigm för arbete. De begärde lön som motsvarade arbetet som utförs i mellanrummen, en lön som täckte all tid som krävs för att skapa, repetera, fundera, komma på idéer, prova dem på andra, fatta beslut, åka fram och tillbaka och så vidare. När de begärde att allt det där skulle erkännas som arbetstid öppnade de verkligen för alla andra att ställa samma slags krav, eftersom idag är all tid produktiv tid.

Till exempel; om inte jag tar hand om barnen, vem ska då ta hand om dem? frågar sig hemmafrun (vilket jag inte är). Antingen tar jag hand om barnen eller så gör min man det och då kan han inte gå till sitt jobb. En idé vi hade för ett par år sedan var att om vi ordnar en generalstrejk för arbetare inom vård- och omsorgsyrkena, alla som tar hand om gamla, sjuka, barn och så vidare, då finns det ingen som tar hand om mina barn, då måste jag göra det själv och då kan jag inte gå till jobbet. Ekonomin stannar av. När det händer kan ingen annan ta min plats. Då måste jag göra det själv och då kan jag inte gå till jobbet.

Prekaritet är alltså även detta, vad kan man då göra? Till att börja med kämpa mot den allmänna prekariseringen, inte bara av arbetet utan även av livet i sin helhet, och kräva grundläggande garantier, eftersom prekariteten i rask takt håller på att nedmontera det som återstår av arbetsrätten. Det är en poäng. Men om vi nöjer oss med de kraven nöjer vi oss också med en reformism, som kanske är nödvändig, men som ändå inte räcker till, eftersom vi vet vad reformismen har gett oss under historiens lopp. På samma gång som vi kräver rättigheter och garantier med klassiska begrepp måste vi också kräva att omvandlingen som skett i kapitalets själva struktur, i själva produktionens värdeförmering, tas med i beräkningen.

Jag måste säga, mina kära herrar kapitalister, parasiter, för det är vad ni är. Ni snor åt er det som jag producerar under 24 timmar av liv, inte åtta timmar som mitt liv producerar, men utan den produktionen skulle er kapitalism inte kunna suga ut en enda spänn. Paradoxen är alltså att ni har expanderat ert herravälde men ni har dessutom expanderat min möjlighet till motstånd. Med andra ord, kära herrar, ni snor åt er, ni tar, ni lägger beslag på det som jag producerar under mitt liv och därför måste mitt liv betalas för på ett sätt som går utanför alla sorters arbetskontrakt oavsett om det handlar om svartjobb, tidsbegränsade anställningar, prekära jobb eller ströjobb. Eftersom idag är det mitt liv som producerar. Fabriken är idag livet. Fabriken är idag vårt samhälleliga liv, det är inte längre fabriken. Visserligen finns det fortfarande fabriker men utöver det klassiskt erkända fabriksarbetet finns livet som producerar. Och därför ska jag ha betalt för att vara vid liv. Detta är biopolitik! Alltså en villkorslös inkomst. Sedan kan vi diskutera om det ska vara lön, inkomst, medborgarlön. Betala för mitt liv, eftersom jag är vid liv – inte för att jag är biologiskt vid liv, det biologiska livet existerar inte, det är ständigt betingat av tusen ickenaturliga element; kulturella, politiska, samhälleliga och kollektiva.

Intervjun med Judith Revel gjordes av Psychic Warfare, Josef Yusuf och Mathias Wåg i samband med Iaspis konferens "Work, work, work" december 2010.

Illustration: Robin Blom



Maurizio Lazzarato





FÖR ATT FÅ TILLGÅNG TILL DE SOCIALA SKYDDSNÄTEN MÅSTE ALLT MER SKYLDIGHETER UPPFYLLAS. HUR KAN MAN ORGANISERA SIG KOLLEKTIVT – I EN TID DÅ FATTIGDOM, SKULDSÄTTNING OCH ARBETSLÖSHET SES SOM ETT INDIVIDUELLT ANSVAR?

Brand: Du håller på med en deltagande arbetarundersökning av projekt- och osäkert anställda i underhållningsbranschen, de så kallade intermittent et précaires du spectacle. Hur hänger denna undersökning samman med din forskning om Foucaults maktbegrepp?

Maurizio: Vi fokuserade i undersökningen dels på de man kallar pigiste i Frankrike, alltså de frilansare som skriver artiklar men inte är anställda av tidningarna, och dels på prekaritet mer allmänt, framförallt de som går på RMI (en fransk form av socialbidrag) och som varken har arbete eller arbetslöshetsersättning utan bara en minimiinkomst på 400 euro som utbetalas oavsett om man gör ingenting, alltså endast därför att man lever här. Med denna sammansättning håller vi alltså sedan mer än ett år tillbaka på med denna kombination av undersökning och aktion. Samtidigt så började jag att skriva min text om den pastoralmakt Foucault teoretiserade om utifrån Kafkas skrifter (och då framförallt Slottet), ett begrepp som är användbart även i undersökningen eftersom dessa arbetslösa socialbidragstagare är tvungna att gå återkommande intervjuer med administrationens funktionärer. Dessa funktionärer som står på andra sidan, som jobbar på exempelvis arbetsförmedlingar, ingår i vårat arbete tillsammans med de arbetslösa och socialbidragstagarna. Vi håller på att se vilken typ av relation som skapas mellan dem. Begreppet pastoralmakt fungerar mycket bra här då vi rör oss inom subjektiviteten – de ställer många intima frågor om livsplaner och man försöker verkligen påverka människors beteende i riktning mot arbetet, alltså man rör sig mot en sorts workfare. När du förr om åren befann dig i en situation som dessa socialbidragstagare var du tvungen att skriva på ett kontrakt som sade att du har ett projekt för ditt liv som du sedan måste respektera men det kunde då vara att ta körkort eller något annat. Nu går allt mot att du ska hitta en anställning och så ökar kontrollen av denna typ av människor. Nu kontrollerar man ditt arv, hur mycket pengar du har på banken och så vidare. För bara ett par år sedan var det ingen som frågade dig hur mycket du har tjänat, ifall du äger en bostad eller om du har sparat pengar så folk har lite förtroende för det nya system och den nya informationen de möter. Numer är kontrollen av dessa arbetslösa och prekära mycket strängare.

För Foucault låg skillnaden mellan att styra (governare) och härska (comandare) i detta. Också vi i Sverige har denna typ av workfare. Förr fanns det inga plikter att uppfylla för få dessa rättigheter men idag måste man uppfylla en mängd krav för att få sina rättigheter. Styrande och härskande har alltså slagits samman.

På så sätt har man från att få socialbidrag utan krav på motprestation skapat ett läge där det i praktiken blir fråga om en skuld, alltså som att staten hade lånat en slant och att du måste gå med på att du satt dig i skuld. Vi har diskuterat detta mycket under våra år av forskning. A-kasseersättningen är inte heller längre en sak som man automatiskt får bara för att man tidigare betalat in sin avgift. Nu måste du, förutom att betala den medan du jobbar, även visa att du söker andra jobb under din arbetslöshet. Alla välfärdsutgifterna håller på att förvandlas till skuld, du måste alltså känna dig ansvarig för din skuld gentemot staten och ur denna synpunkt även skyldig för den därför att de senaste tjugo årens politik som man nu verkligen känner av är att arbetslöshet och fattigdom inte är sociala problem utan en fråga om individuella beteenden, det hänger alltså på dig. Det är ditt beteende som avgör om du är fattig eller arbetslös.

Fattigdom handlar då inte om en struktur utan om individuellt ansvar. För politikerna är det de subjektiva beteendena som är problemet och anledningen till arbetslöshet. Så man måste alltså ändra dessa beteenden genom att ingripa på personnivå, genom den relation som jag beskrev i erfarenheterna mellan de prekära arbetarna och de administrativa funktionärerna.

Men eftersom dessa kontrollformer riktas mot individen verkar det som om att motståndet är individuellt och reaktivt. Kan vi föreställa oss ett motstånd som är kollektivt och proaktivt?

Visst är det svårt i termer av organisering eftersom relationen är på individnivå men i Frankrike har det funnits tillfällen då dessa frågor gett upphov till en politisk rörelse. De arbetslösas rörelse för tio år sedan var ganska speciell då det är ett svårorganiserat område. Rörelsen intermittent du spectacle som delar den egenskapen att de är prekära (de arbetar en tid för att sedan vara arbetslösa en tid och så vidare) har lyckats skapa en kollektiv form, men till största delen består denna form av mikroaktioner. Man går till exempel tillsammans på intervjuer och förhandlingar, men det är inget massfenomen. Till exempel så har projektet med intermittent du spectacle som satte igång under 2003 visserligen försvagats men det fortsätter i alla fall. Vid två tillfällen i veckan samlas projekt- och osäkert anställda samt arbetslösa för att dela information, erfarenheter och diskutera. Där kan man få en uppfattning om vilka de vanliga problemen är genom dem som kommer dit, vilka brukar vara ett tiotal varje möte. En lista går runt där du skriver upp om du till exempel har problem med något administativt eller med chefen. På de mötena kommer folk med tekniska eller politiska problem, kanske får du inte ut din lön, du har utsatts för kontroller och så vidare. Man sammanställer en lista på de problem som finns och gör kollektiva aktioner, som att gå tillsammans till något arbetslöshetskontor, ockupera det och diskutera med folk för att lösa problemen. Men det är alltså inget massfenomen än så länge.

Du kommer ju från operaisterna i Italien och för er var begreppen vägran och olydnad viktiga men var det inte lättare att hitta politiska former för dessa på 60-talet i fabrikerna än idag?

Visst är det så att man idag inte har en sådan fysisk plats, förutom då man till exempel går till dessa socialkontor eller arbetsförmedlingar. Man jobbar ett tag på en plats och sedan blir man arbetslös, för att sedan få en projektanställning och därefter arbetslös igen. Man byter hela tiden så det är svårt att hitta en plats där man finner former av solidaritet och råd. I Frankrike var underhållningsbranschens prekära arbetare alla isolerade men fann varandra genom sin delade gemensamma situation, trots att de inte befinner sig i en fabrik och arbetar tillsammans. Någon är med i en pjäs på teatern, en annan i en film. Man byter hela tiden arbete, arbetsplats, arbetskamrater, allt. Det är i dessa människors situation som denna flytande befolkning (som Foucault kallar dem) funnit ett sätt att slå sig ihop för att situationen gäller för alla.

▶ Läs mer om pastoralmakt, se Säkerhet, territorium, befolkning av Michel Foucault (Tankekraft förlag 2010).

Maurizio Lazzarato föreläste hösten 2010 om pastoralmakt på konferensen The Politics of Life - Michel Foucault and the Biopolitics of Modernity på Iaspis i Stockholm. Intervjun och översättningen är gjord av Josef Yusuf, Elena Pontil och Mathias Wåg.

Illustration: Emma Tryti & LInn Ahlgren



Nina Power

THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE PUBLIC SPACE ARE SHRINKING, BUT THE PUBLIC ORDER IS STILL STRONG. IT IS A COMPLEX SITUATION. A SITUATION THAT DESPERATELY CALLS FOR SOMETHING NEW.



Brand: You've written a lot about the relationship between the public and the private sector. From a feminist point of view, can you describe how the reduction of the public sector has affected women in work? Since the public sector historically has employed a lot of women.

Nina: There have been various reports about how the cuts and unemployment are negatively effecting women more than men, but also black women in particularly, so it's about gender, class and race at the same time.

I think there's a question if it ideologically is going to go back to a right-wing narrative of asking women to "go back to your home". But I don't think it would work anymore. The time has past for them to be able to say something like that. You can't on the one hand educate people and say that they are workers first of all, regardless of their gender, and then suddenly rewrite the script and say that women are naturally domestic. I don't think it will work. It's more a way of trying to make people feel better about the fact there's no work.

Obviously there's always going to be some work you can't mechanize or sell to another country. At the end of the day – in for example care – it's supposed to be human. And it has always been true that women have taken more care of elderly and children. I suppose there's an interesting question of the word "care", in order to avoid the essentialist argument about women being more caring and that's way they should be carers. I talked with my friend Becky, who is a nurse, and the one thing she really hates is when people say, "oh, you're such a good person, you must care so much", like being a nurse is somehow a moral thing, about her being a good person. Does it mean she shouldn't get paid very much? It's the ambiguity of the role: you like doing it and therefore you should be paid less.

The public sector – which has a very high female workforce – is tended to be quite secure, with relatively okay pay (of course very low in some areas) and pensions. And there's always this fight because people in the private sector doesn't have the same security as the employed in the public sector has. This creates a situation where people in the private sector saying "why do you people defend things we don't have?" All the big union protests can only be about pensions and conditions, because what you're allowed to protest about is so minimal. This is because of all the changes that Thatcher made to the law about unions protesting. You're not allowed to have solidarity strikes or general strikes, because they're all banned. It would be very interesting if the unions started to act illegally.

The current situation desperately calls for a new public.

I find it all very bewildering. Because of the shrinkage of the state, there is so much indifference about people's future. When there's very little skill based economy, no productive economy, massive unemployment and no public support, it's very unclear what people are supposed to do.

If we look at Spain and the whole Indignado Movement, a lot of it seems to me based on people saying "look, we've been trained for this world, highly educated and no there is nothing for us here". The organisation they take on is among themselves, in the absence of work and the promises of a future. What does happen when you have a very highly educated, self-motivated, maybe youngish generation of people, is that they come up with their own solutions.

Someone from Spain and the Indignado Movement came over to London and he described this generation in terms of depression. I think we have to touch upon the mass pharmacological control of people. It's a way of covering over real political sadness. For example, the women of the 50s in USA were controlled with very high dosages of antidepressants. In the UK the government today offers a programme to get people back to work. But as far as I understand, it doesn't really address the roots of the problems, it's just a way of stopping you from thinking about bad things and not sorting them out. So you have a medicalization on a superficial, behavioural level to get people back into work.

People have also been supposed to feel morally guilty about not finding a job, like it's your own fault and you're not trying hard enough. We've had all these horrible TV-shows about how changing yourself – your haircut, walk, and accent – would help you find a job. These shows are often filmed in very poor areas. They are trying to convince people that unemployment isn't something structural. But I don't think that can hold any longer. There are no jobs! If you've sent off 200 job applications and haven't been called to a single interview, then it doesn't matter how much you try. Because people are really trying. So I think this moral discourse is over.

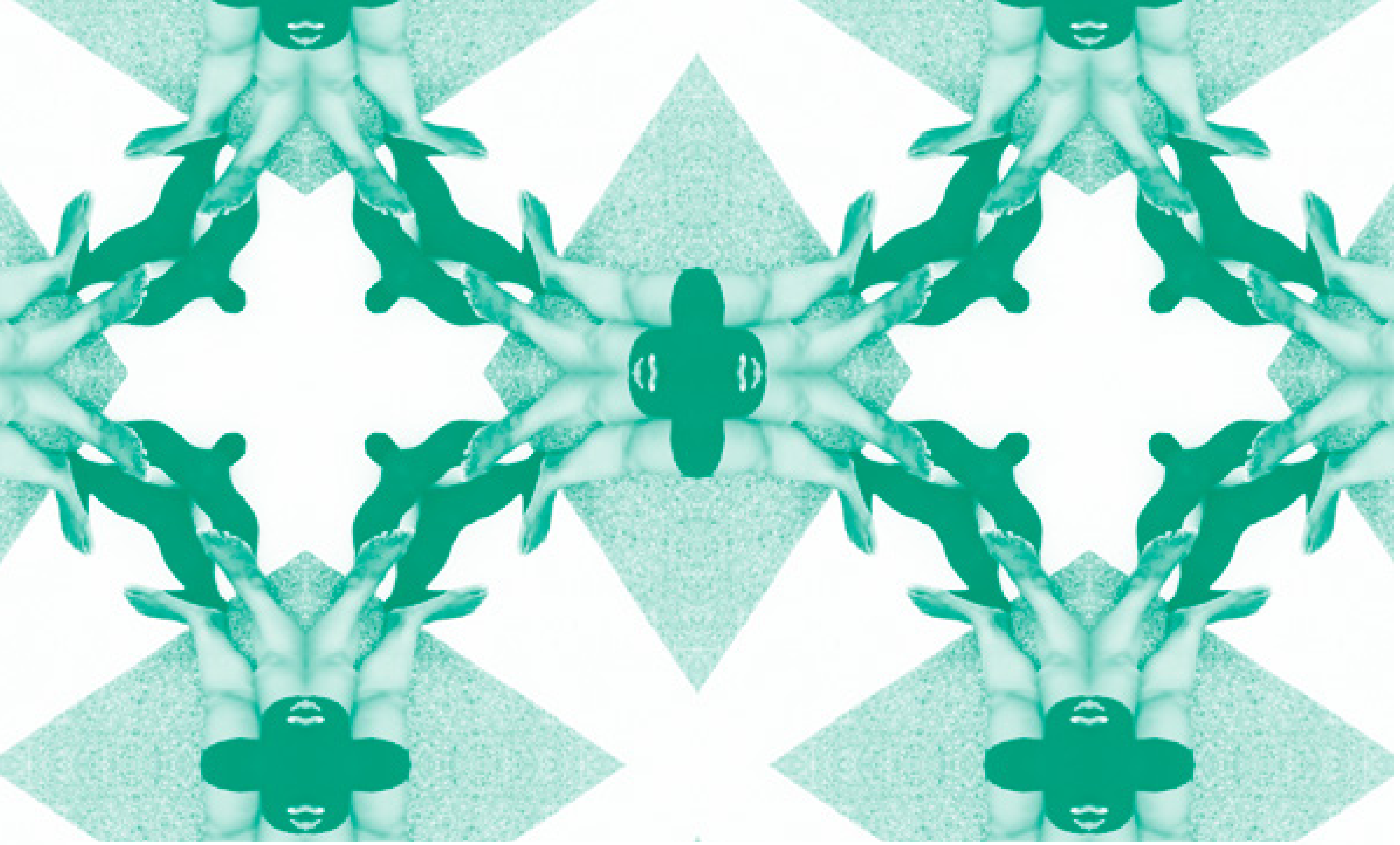
Instead there is a sort of blankness. A lot of people are really depressed and it's easier to medicalize and treat them that way. Being unemployed in Britain is a really depressing image. Poor, isolated and very lonely. And if you close things like the library, which is a place where you can go, then it really is just you and your flat, which you can't pay the rent on.

And the squatting is now illegal, right?

Exactly. They have also started raids and evicting people from these places. It's just madness. Homelessness is increasing. I think a lot of people often are closer to homelessness than one think, like it's one paycheck missing and then you screwed. Especially regarding London, it really is a matter of economic cleansing, in attempt to get rid of the poor people. They have been doing this in different ways for a long time. But it doesn't make any sense, because how do you keep a city running without cleaners, nurses and bus drivers? Where are these people supposed to live if you have a city full of only rich people? It doesn't make sense. Even the mayor of London – who is this very right-wing person – Boris Johnson has said against the government, he did compare it to ethnic cleansing, and that's a Tory person speaking against the current government.

You have said that there is no more public space, only public order. How is that a feminist concern? The project of taking back, revitalize the public or creating something new, how can that be a feminist project?

I think the first thing that needs to be done is to work out what the feminist relation to something like the public order is.



I had a really bad experience in terms of getting threatening messages from police officers was when I had written a piece for the Guardian were I asked if it's possible imagining a world without police. On one police blog, some of the commentators were writing and saying things like "I'd like to see a world without the police and let Nina go to some dodgy council estate and wait until some gangster makes her his bitch". It's like, if you criticizes the protecting nature of the police towards women, they'll abandon you to the rapist, aggressive men. It's clear that some police see their role almost as paternalistic in a horrible way. Like they are saying "we are protecting the women from other men". They have a very traditional image of women, so they really hate women in protest because if women are angry in the public space, they're not playing their role as demure creatures protected by the police.

I think there are much bigger questions about fear as well, which are obviously stoked by the police and fit in to this argument of all the police protecting women from other men who are potentially rapist. It's a very complicated situation, on the one hand you'd like to say there should be no fear, nobody should be afraid of organizing in the city, it belongs to you and everyone. But it's hard to see in that way when those wars are in play, I guess. I think something like protest, even just walking on the streets, is a subjectively important thing, like Take Back the Night for example, at least momentarily they open the possibility of thinking that it is possible.

You describe a very terrifying situation in today's Britain, and especially London, with the massive precarization and austerity measures, and the creation of a generation without a future. Being in this situation, with the risk of surrender into cynicism and nihilism, is there hope?

I think it all goes back to self-organization and self-determination, because that is what's happening in face of the current situation. The problem is to avoid these things being locked down or incorporated. But I guess it's only a question of practices.

The interview was made by Karin Bähler Lavér from Prekari(a)tet and Samira Ariadad from Brand in September 2012.

Illustration: The treasure factory (Brita Lindvall, Patriez van der Wens)

Michael Hardt



WHAT THE HELL IS SUBJECTIVITY AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO IMMATERIAL LABOUR? HOW IS IT RELATED TO REPRODUCTIVE WORK, AND WHAT SUBJECTIVITIES, OR SOCIAL RELATIONS ARE FORMED BY COMMODITIES?

Brand: Could you explain what you mean by biopolitical production and if this concept is still relevant to the new subjectivities formed now that we have seen this transition in finance economy to debt economy, and how biopolitical production is related to reproductive work? Why should we use that term?

Michael: There are some relatively successful attempts to organize around the kinds of subjectivities we're thinking of in Declaration. For instance, the strongest of the Occupy Wall Street groups that remains, it seems to me, is Strike Debt. One of the first things when organizing around debt is recognizing the interconnectedness of student loans, health care loans, housing debts, all kinds of other individual personal debts that people have, but maybe more important is to deindividualize them.

The question of biopower makes sense to me, in terms of subjectivity. Recognizing the function of contemporary capital was not only about the production of goods and its domination over you while you are at work, but rather about it encompassing all aspects of your life. What capital produces and forces you to reproduce are forms of life. I mean Marx does say things like that, but it's not like the fact that Marx says it that makes it right, but it at least helps communicate with some people. Marx starts by saying that the first form of appearances of capital is the production of commodities. But that is only the first form of appearance. From that we can then recognize, once we understand it better, that what it really produces is not commodities but surplus value. But actually when we look at that more, what capital produces, he says, is a social relation. And that's what I consider the point of revival of Marx's understanding of how capital functions by producing social relations. That's very similar to this notion of biopower. That power acts by producing a form of life. Which is closely allied with saying that it produces subjectivity. So when Foucault invents the concept of biopower, and reading his work around power in general, one can often assume that there is no alternative to it. He will talk about resistance, but often as an afterthought, or that's the way it is often read. It seems important to Toni and I to think about possibilities of alternatives from within not only these forms of power as an external force but as how within them we can invent alternatives. Biopower is the production of forms of life. It's not only that they seep into all of our life; they are authors of all aspects of our life. Thinking about the possibilities within that, of not only resistance but also a production of an alternative is what we mean by biopolitical struggles.

Marx didn't see this extension that takes place within the home, the reproductive work. How is this notion of biopolitical resistance related to that form of producing subjectivity, to production and reproduction?

Marx certainly couldn't see that, or the elements that you will have to struggle for to get Marx to see gender division of labour or unpaid reproductive work as part of the capitalist relation, you are right, that doesn't fit, but I do think that the notion of biopower and biopolitical production does allow us to extend the vision of capitalist domination from beyond the wage relation. I had come out of and was directly informed by these



socialist feminist analysis of care work, kin work, maternal labour… One of the things that were troubling to me or incomplete to me in that discussion about immaterial production in our group in France at that time was the lack of ability to think affect. Through the realm of affect it seemed to me where certain things could come together, the questions of feminist conditions about care, and reproductive work and certainly also the Spinozian notions of affect that carried with them all kinds of things that interested us.

I think what is helpful is to recognize ways in which capitalist production is being transformed, because many of our friends and political allies, especially within traditional labour movements, continue to recognize production as only invested in material commodities. And it is true of course that all this talk about the immaterial is misleading and wrong, because all these immaterial things have material, at least substrata, code is always in silicon or affect is always in flesh, or any number of things like that. But I find it pedagogically useful to recognize how, in fact I would say that the increasing immateriality of contemporary production helps us recognize in retrospect what we thought was commodity production, that commodity was just a midpoint, towards the production of social relations. So now we can see the production of refrigerators, it looked like just a bunch of refrigerators, but it is really the production of the nuclear family that circulates around that refrigerator. Or the production of automobiles was really the production of the strange being separated and all together on the freeway. It's really the social relation at the end of the capital relation, and the capitalist mode of dominating us rather than the things.

What does the s do in common(s) and how do you respond to the problems, which for example Silvia Federici has, with the separation of artificial and natural commons?

The thing that irritates me in the whole range of discussions about commons is nostalgia for pre-capitalist forms. So, in English, the using with the s is in most instances a kind of insistence that before capital there were relationships of sharing, of open access etc. Well, you know, a lot of pre-capitalist relations really sucked, and what often gets brought back are nostalgic notions of community that eclipse a number of hierarchies, gender hierarchies and other hierarchies that I don't want to reproduce. So for me personally, but I realize this is idiosyncratic, using the s functions to link to pre-capitalist forms. In general I think of the common as defined by two things: by open access and by a democratic mechanism of decision making. Property, in contrast, is about monopoly of use and also monopoly of decision making. Public or private properties both involve those enclosures or limitations.

I'm inspired by linking together, let's say, "natural" and "artificial" notions of the common, although those two don't quite work… but ok let's use them for a little bit. One difference seems to be really important to maintain, or to think through. So, why talk about the natural and the artificial separately. I think it's important to try to think them together, but not too quickly. This became clear to me around the Copenhagen Counter Summit. In many environmental conceptions of the common, the notion of our use and the management of the common is based fundamentally on the notion of limits because the earth itself is limited, so we have to figure out ways of what it means to share the earth and ways to work within those limits, and I'm totally on board with that. In contrast though, there are many immaterial forms of the common. When you think about code, about culture in general (music, images, ideas), they're not infinite but our production of them is in so many senses unlimited, At least I don't recognize the limits, maybe they are quickly superseded in new limits form, it's very different from the kinds we have with the earth. It's those questions on limits and unlimitedness that need to be worked out conceptually and negotiated. What was exciting for me about the Copenhagen summit was that there were two streams of activist friends working together, one coming from an anti-capitalist perspective, focusing on the immaterial notion of the common and one ecological stream.

The references to what the common have been are quite hierarchical, created by the state and institutionalized, especially in the former social democratic countries like Sweden. A lot of these institutions are now being used for private purposes. Liberalism has made it hard for people to now imagine taking these back; here we see the limits of the subjectivities. We should imagine how things could be done now and what the common could be to us now. Is our own governmentality the only way we can create new examples?

Yes. Conceptually, it's important to make the distinction between the common and the public. By the public I mean that which is ultimately the access to and decisions over what is controlled by the state while the common stands in contrast both to private and to public property. In many of the so-called advanced liberal societies there are lots of public areas that often seem to be common, but then you recognize they are not. In many instances it seems like the limits of our imaginations are contained in the alternative between these two. The only thing we can use against private property is something public, and all the ills that someone can come up with about public property can be addressed by privatization.

I'm not the kind of person who would say that everything public is bad or that all instances of state defence against private property is bad. I would have different analyses in and learn different things from different places. For example in Latin America during the past ten years these so called leftist governments came to power in a social movement for the common, for making the water common, the earth itself, lithium, oil etc. or social relations through the models of indigenous communities. These no longer neoliberal states came to power and do struggle against the privatization of resources, but the movements need to continue struggling towards the common also against the state that claims to represent them and to be their successor. Sometimes you have to be allied with them, but sometimes you have to oppose the public, in a kind of double relation. I imagine in Sweden there is a lot of ways in how one does want the state to combat privatization and provide welfare resources. I don't think there's anything hypocritical about insisting on the state doing that and in other instances trying to reclaim, or claim for the first time, common spaces and relations against the public.

The interview was made by Karin Bähler Lavér, Cesar Tafoya from Prekari(a)tet and Samira Ariadad from Brand in February 2013.

Illustration: Emma Tryti

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